

Message Text

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ACTION AF-07

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-05 NSAE-00 PA-01

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R 140905Z NOV 74

FM AMEMBASSY TANANARIVE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6699

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, MA, US

SUBJECT: AGM AIRCRAFT STOLEN: REPPAS STILL IN JAIL

REF: USDAO TANANARIVE 0181 NOV 74

1. MALAGASY MEDIA, WED, NOV 13, REPORTED DISAPPEARANCE OF PIPER AZTEC PLANE FROM IVATO, TANANARIVE GJS INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT, ON TUES, EARLY A.M., NOV 12.

2. ACCORDING TO MADAGASCAR PRESSE, THE GOVERNMENT NEWS AGENCY, THE TWO-ENGINE, SIX-SEATER AIRCRAFT BELONGED TO AGM (AMERICAN-GREEK -MALAGASY) COMPANY. IT HAD REMAINED PARKED (AND UNUSED) IN AIR MADAGASCAR HANGARS AT IVATO FOR LAST THREE YEARS. MAD-PRESSE SPECIFIED THAT AIR MADAGASCAR OFFICIAL IN CHARGE OF HANGAR, HAD SEEN AMERICAN WASHING PLANE ON SATURDAY AFTERNOON. AMERICAN HAD CLAIMED THAT HE HAD BEEN AUTHORIZED TO MOVE PLANE BY AIR MADAGASCAR'S DEPUTY DIRECTOR. MAD-PRESSE INDICATED THAT PIPER AZTEC HAD CAPABILITY OF FLYING FOR 5 HOURS AND 30 MINUTES WITHOUT REFUELING. IT ADDED THAT FUEL TANKS OF TWO OTHER PIPER AZTEC PLANES BELONGING TO AIR MADAGASCAR HAD BEEN FOUND TO BE EMPTY.

3. MADAGASCAR MATIN, TANANARIVE'S MAIN FRENCH-LANGUAGE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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DAILY, REPORTED, SUBSTANTIALLY, SAME FACTS; BUT ITS

HEADLINES, FLOWERY COMMENTS, RHETORICAL SPECULATIONS AND PICTURES OF IVATO HANGARS COVERED SIX COLUMNS OF ITS FRONT AND THIRD PAGES. MATIN SAID THAT, ACCORDING TO INVESTIGATIONS OF ITS REPORTERS, SEVERAL FOREIGNERS (AMERICANS) PAID MANY LONG VISITS TO IVATO AIRPORT DURING PAST MONTH; ONE OF SUB-TITLES OF REPORTDLY UNIDENTIFIED PERSON WHO "STOLE" THE PLANE AS "A QUIET AMERICAN." IN EDITORIAL NOTE, MATIN WONDERED WHETHER "THEFT" HAD NOT BEEN PERPETRATED BY "TWO SWINDLERS, REPPAS AND BACOPOULOS, WHO HAD THUS MANAGED TO ESCAPE FROM PRISON AND LEAVE COUNTRY." (EMBASSY COMMENT: THEY HAVE NOT ESCAPED.) IN SEPARATE COMMENT, TITLED "TO WHOM DID PIRATES' PLANE BELONG?" MATIN INDICATED THAT PIPER AZTEC WAS NOT OWNED BY AGM BUT BY MARATHON TRADE COMPANY WHICH HAD ACQUIRED IT WITH LOAN FROM BANK OF AMERICA. MATIN ADDED HOWEVER, THAT LEADER OF BOTH COMPANIES WAS AMERICAN GEORGE REPPAS AND THAT AGM AND MARATHON TRADE OCCUPIED THE SAME OFFICES AND EMPLOYED THE SAME PERSONNEL IN THEIR SAN FRANCISCO HEADQUARTERS.

4. WEDNESDAY 12:45 P.M. RADIO TANANARIVE NEWS BROADCAST OPENED WITH ANNOUNCEMENT OF DISAPPEARANCE OF PIPER AZTEC. TANANARIVE RADIO MADE NO MENTION OF THE NATIONALITY OF THE "THIEF" OF (AGM) PLANE, WHO, IT SAID, WAS "UNIDENTIFIED" PERSON. IT ADDED THAT WHILE NONE OF SUPPOSITIONS CIRCULATING IN CONNECTION WITH THIS INCIDENT HAD BEEN VERIFIED YET, THESE SUPPOSITIONS WERE NOT NECESSARILY INACCURATE.

5. MALAGASY-LANGUAGE PRESS ALSO DID NOT MENTION NATIONALITY OF THIEF.

6. EMBASSY COMMENT: WHILE MYSTERIOUS AIRPLANE THEFT MAKES GOOD COPY MOST ANYWHERE, SENSATIONAL COVERAGE OF AGM AND REPPAS ASPECTS IS ILLUSTRATIVE OF HIGH MALAGASY INTEREST IN AGM-RELATED SUBJECTS, ESPECIALLY IN TANANARIVE. CHARGE HAS APPOINTMENT TODAY WITH SECGEN MOFA AT LATTER'S REQUEST PRESUMABLY THIS SUBJECT.
ELFERS

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